

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.



ESSAYS

Pearl Harbor ended the massive public debate between those in favor of and those opposed to U.S. involvement in overseas conflicts not simply for the duration of the World War II, but actually for the next thirty years. "Isolationism" was said to have died on December 7, 1941, thoroughly discredited by the Japanese attack. Henceforth the United States would in its own interests have to play a major role in halting any aggression in the international arena. During the 1950s and 1960s, however, such beliefs played a major role in leading the United States into war in Vietnam. This conflict sharply divided the American people and ended the national foreign policy consensus long before it resulted in a humiliating defeat. Consequently it led many Americans to a new look at what by this time appeared to be the prophetic warnings of Roosevelt's prewar critics regarding the long-term negative consequences of the president's internationalist policies, and therefore to a reconsideration of the wisdom of those policies. The first essay, by Bruce M. Russett of Yale University, belongs to this school of thought. In it the author maintains that the United States could and should have avoided not only war with Japan, but also war with Nazi Germany.

Most scholars disagreed sharply with Russett's provocative conclusions. Among the most notable of these was Gerhard Weinberg of the University of North Carolina, a World War II scholar who had previously unearthed a second book Hitler had written after his *Mein Kampf*. In that second book, the Nazi dictator made clear his plans for global, not simply European, war and conquest, with the United States as one of his principal enemies. In the second essay, Weinberg shows Hitler acting on these plans in 1940–1941, and the global nature and interrelationships of German, Japanese and U.S. policies in 1940–1941. Combining his reassessment of Hitler's goals with recent and harsh reassessments of Japanese policies, Weinberg argues that Nazi Germany and militaristic Japan posed a mortal threat to the United States—one that required (and left the United States with no alternative to) full-scale participation in the war, despite Roosevelt's contrary desire to keep that participation limited, and the ensuing total destruction of Axis power.

An Unnecessary and Avoidable War

BRUCE M. RUSSETT

American participation in World War II brought the country few gains; the United States was no more secure at the end than it could have been had it stayed out. First, let us look at the "might have beens" in Europe. The standard justification of American entry into the war is that otherwise Germany would have reigned supreme on the continent, victor over Russia and Britain. With all the resources of Europe at the disposal of his totalitarian government, plus perhaps parts of the British fleet, Hitler

From Bruce M. Russett, *No Clear and Present Danger: A Skeptical View of American Entry into World War II* (New York: Harper and Row, 1972, 1997), 8, 10, 24–30, 34–36, 42, 44–49, 54–61, 63–66, 86. Copyright © 1972 by Bruce M. Russett. Reprinted by permission of HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

would have posed an intolerable threat to the security of the United States. He could have consolidated his winnings, built his war machine, established bridgeheads in South America, and ultimately could and likely would have moved against North America to achieve world domination.

Several links in this argument might deserve scrutiny, but by far the critical one is the first, that Hitler would have won World War II. Such a view confuses the ability of Germany's enemies to *win* with their ability to achieve a *stalemate*. Also, it tends to look more at the military-political situation of June 1940 than at that of December 1941, and to confuse President Roosevelt's decision to aid Britain (and later Russia) by "all measure short of war" with an actual American declaration of war. Let me say clearly: I basically accept the proposition that German domination of all Europe, with Britain and Russia prostrate, would have been intolerable to the United States. By any of the classical conceptions of "power-balancing" and "national interest," the United States should indeed have intervened if necessary to prevent that outcome. . . .

But . . . [b]y the end of 1941 Hitler had already lost his gamble to control Europe. In large part this was due to British skill, courage, and good luck in the summer of 1940. Given German naval inferiority, Hitler had to destroy the British air force for an invasion to be possible. But the RAF won the Battle of Britain and Hitler decided against undertaking Operation Sea Lion; it was too risky. From that point onward German relative capabilities for a cross-channel attack declined rather than improved. The ebb of the tide against Hitler was very greatly assisted, as an absolutely essential condition, by American military and economic assistance to the British.

Recall American initiatives during the first two years of war in Europe. In the fall of 1939 the Neutrality Act was amended to repeal the arms embargo and make any goods available to all belligerents on a cash-and-carry basis. Thanks to the British fleet, only the Allies could take advantage of this measure. The destroyers-for-bases exchange with Britain was agreed upon in September 1940. Many of the old American warships were of doubtful military value, but the trade's symbolism was extremely significant. The Lend-Lease Act, which was to pour billions of dollars of supplies into Britain and, beginning later, to Russia, was signed in March 1941. In July 1941 United States forces occupied Iceland and President Roosevelt had agreed that American ships would escort convoys—including British ships—as far as Iceland. Convoying meant that if German U-boats approached the American escorts were to "shoot on sight" to insure that the goods got through. These steps played central roles in British survival. By August Roosevelt and Churchill could meet in a cruiser off Argentia, Newfoundland to discuss military collaboration and, with the Atlantic Charter, to begin planning for the postwar world.

I do not, therefore, argue that American nonbelligerent assistance to Britain was a mistake, quite the contrary. Yet that is just the point—by the end of 1941 Britain's survival was essentially assured. . . .

If British survival into 1941 raised the specter of deadlock or war of attrition to Hitler, the failure of his attack on Russia brought the specter to life. . . . With the onset of the Russian winter and Hitler's inability to take Moscow—Napoleon had at least managed that—the prospect of German failure was sharp. Looking back, we now can see that *this* was in fact the hinge of fate; the more visible turning a year later was more nearly the outward sign of a predetermined shift. . . .

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The essential point is that the Russian success, like the British, occurred quite independently of American military action. . . .

Had America remained in the status of twilight belligerence Germany probably would not have been defeated, though as I have argued above, neither could it have won. Probably World War II would have ended in some sort of draw and negotiated settlement, or would have continued on for a decade or two with occasional truces for breathing spells—not unlike the Napoleonic Wars. Or perhaps most likely is some combination of the two, in which the negotiated peace was uneasy and soon broken. What I imagine, then, is a very long and bloody war, longer and even more bloody than the one that really was fought, with protracted savage fighting in east and central Europe. . . .

Some contemporaries of course took a more alarmist view, especially immediately after the fall of France. A *Fortune* magazine survey of Americans in July 1940 found that 63 percent expected that an Axis triumph would bring an immediate German attempt to seize territory in the Western Hemisphere; 43 percent expected an imminent attack on the United States. American army generals feared a Nazi invasion of South America, and to forestall it wanted a major base in Trinidad. The continued resistance of Britain calmed such alarm for a while, though it was to be revived in somewhat similar form in 1942 with the anticipation of German aerial attacks on American cities and towns. Seacoast areas were allotted major anti-aircraft units. Blackout regulations were widely enforced. School children were taught how to crouch against basement walls clenching corks between their teeth in the event of bombardment. Fiorello LaGuardia, then head of the Office of Civilian Defense, wanted 50 million gas masks.

All of this of course seems more than a little absurd in light of known—then as well as now—German capabilities. Not a single German bomb ever did fall in North or South America. Any kind of troop landing required naval and logistic support utterly beyond Hitler's reach. After all, it was not until two and a half years of war, with vast shipping and naval superiority, and a base in Britain, that the Allies felt able to cross even the English Channel in an invasion the other way. The bogeyman of Nazi troops in America had no more substance than that, several years later, of Russian landings.

This is not to say that ultimately a German victory might not have posed some such dangers, nor to imply any certainty about limitations to Hitler's intentions. A. J. P. Taylor paints Hitler as essentially a classical German statesman without real ambition to dominate Europe; Alan Bullock sees ambition, but directed largely toward Eastern Europe and certainly not toward the new world. We need not accept either of these views. Other writers grant that the documents have turned up no German plan before December 1941 for a military attack on the United States, but contend that such plans might well have developed ultimately. One does show some Hitlerian ravings and notions of ultimate war with America, beginning in October 1940. This same author emphasizes that the mere absence of plans is no proof that Hitler did not have, or could not have developed, the intent. At this point the argument of those who posit the possibility of a later threat becomes impossible to refute. One must ask realistic questions about German capability, not intention.

Very possibly a stalemate would not have marked the end of Hitler's ambitions, but that is not really the point. For some time at least, Germany would not have been

supreme as an immediate menace to the United States. One further step in still another war would first be required—the ultimate victory over Britain and/or Russia, and if that should in fact be threatened, the United States could still have intervened *then*, and done so while allies existed. By the end of 1941 the pressure for such intervention had really passed for *that* war. Even those who most heavily stress the dangers of Nazi subversion in North and South America grant that “There still would be ominous eddies, but by the summer of 1940 the Nazi cause was in retreat in the new world.” . . .

Finally, we ought to confront the argument that sheer morality demanded American intervention against Hitler. I have deliberately left this issue aside, defining our concern to be only with the structure of the international system, the relative weight of power facing the United States and its potential allies. My argument has accepted the “realist” one that fears the concentration of great power in other hands regardless of the apparent goals, ideology, or morality of those wielding that power. Concern with the morality of others’ domestic politics is an expensive luxury, and evaluations all too subject to rapid change. . . .

Yet some would maintain that Hitler was just too evil to tolerate, that the United States had a moral duty to exterminate him and free those under his rule. . . .

Still, in this context Hitler must be compared with Stalin, who was hardly a saint, and who as a result of the complete German collapse in 1945 emerged from the war with an immensely greater empire. We must remember the terror and paranoid purges of his rule, and such examples of Stalinist humanity as the starvation of millions of kulaks. The worst Nazi crimes emerged only in 1943 and later at Nuremberg. German “medical experiments” and extermination camps were unknown to the world in 1941. Though the Hitler regime had anything but a savory reputation then, the moral argument too is essentially one made in hindsight, not a primary motivation at the time war was declared. . . .

If one rejects the purely moral justification of American entry into the war against Hitler, no very effective moral brief can then be made for the war in the Pacific. True, the Japanese were often unkind conquerors, though this can easily be exaggerated by American memories of the Bataan death march and other horrors in the treatment of prisoners. Japanese occupation was often welcomed in the former European colonies of Southeast Asia, and Japan retains some reservoir of good will for its assistance, late in the war, of indigenous liberation movements. In any case it is Hitler, not Tojo, who is customarily presented as the personification of evil. Possibly Americans did have some vague obligation to defend Chinese independence, but more clearly than in Europe the basis for American participation has to be *realpolitik*. The case has to be founded on a conviction that Japan was too powerful, too dangerously expansionist without any apparent restraint, to have been left alone. An extreme but widely accepted version is given by an early chronicler of the war:

Japan in the spring and summer of 1941 would accept no diplomatic arrangement which did not give it everything that it might win in the Far East by aggression, without the trouble and expense of military campaigns.

The evidence, however, shows quite a different picture both of intent and capability. Nor is it enough simply to assert that, because Japan attacked the United States

at Pearl Harbor, America was provoked, but very deceptive. The British, and Dutch, and American strike against the Axis, and the antagonistic acts. In the undertook actions that of war. To understand

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at Pearl Harbor, America took no action to begin hostilities. This is formally true, but very deceptive. The Japanese attack would not have come but for the American, British, and Dutch embargo on shipment of strategic raw materials to Japan. Japan's strike against the American naval base merely climaxed a long series of mutually antagonistic acts. In initiating economic sanctions against Japan the United States undertook actions that were widely recognized in Washington as carrying grave risk of war. To understand this requires a retracing of the events of the preceding years. . . .

. . . [The Japanese] apparently believed that their Empire's status as an independent world power depended on military equality with Russia and the United States in the Far East; that in turn depended on a hegemonical position, preferably economic but achieved by force if necessary, in the area of China. Though this seems strange now, an adequate view of Japanese policy in its contemporary context has to remember Tokyo's position as a latecomer to colonialism, in a world where France, Britain, and the United States all had their own spheres of influence.

Japanese forces made important initial gains by occupying most of the Chinese coast and most of China's industrial capacity, but with a trickle of American aid the nationalist armies hung on in the interior. By 1941 the Japanese armies were bogged down, and their progress greatly impeded by raw material shortages. In 1940 Congress placed fuel oil and scrap iron under the new National Defense Act as goods which could not be shipped out of the Western Hemisphere without an export license. Although commerce in these products was not actually cut off for another year, the threat to Japan of a raw material scarcity was obvious, and deliberately invoked by an American government seeking to apply pressure against the Japanese campaign in China. This strategy was exercised in a series of dozens of gradually tightening economic measures—an escalation that was to drive Japan not to capitulation, as it was intended to do, but to war with the United States.

Following the July 1941 freeze on Japanese assets in America, and the consequent cessation of shipment of oil, scrap iron, and other goods from the United States, Japan's economy was in most severe straits and her power to wage war directly threatened. Her military leaders estimated that her reserves of oil, painfully accumulated in the late 1930s when the risk of just such a squeeze became evident, would last at most two years. She was also short of rice, tin, bauxite, nickel, rubber and other raw materials normally imported from the Dutch East Indies and Malaya. Negotiations with the Dutch authorities to supply these goods, plus extraordinary amounts of oil from the wells of Sumatra, had failed, ostensibly on the grounds that the Dutch feared the material would be reexported to the Axis in Europe. The United States, and the British and Dutch, made it quite clear that the embargo would be relaxed only in exchange for Japanese withdrawal from air and naval bases in Indochina (seized in order to prosecute better the war against China) and an agreement which would have meant the end of the Japanese involvement in China and the *abandonment* of any right to station troops in that country, not just a halt to the fighting. The purpose of the Western economic blockade was to force a favorable solution to the "China incident."

Under these conditions, the High Command of the Japanese navy demanded a "settlement" of one sort or other that would restore Japan's access to essential raw materials, most particularly oil. Without restored imports of fuel the fleet could not very long remain an effective fighting force. While the navy might have been willing

to abandon the China campaign, it was utterly opposed to indefinite continuation of the status quo. Either raw material supplies had to be restored by a peaceful settlement with the Western powers, or access to the resources in Thailand, Malaya, and the Indies would have to be secured by force while Japan still retained the capabilities to do so.

If the navy demanded either settlement or war, most members of the Japanese elite were opposed to any settlement which would in effect have meant withdrawal from China. No serious thought was given to the possibility of peace with Chiang's government, for it would have meant the end of all hopes of empire in East Asia and even, it was thought, of influence on the continent of Asia. Moderate Foreign Minister Shigenori Togo reacted to the most forceful statement of American demands, on November 27, 1941, "Japan was asked not only to abandon all the gains of her years of sacrifice, but to surrender her international position as a power in the Far East." In his view that surrender would have been equivalent to national suicide. . . .

Thus, for the various elements in the Japanese government, and for somewhat different reasons, a peaceful settlement ultimately became unacceptable. They could not accede to the American demands, and they could not even continue to drag out the negotiations because of the increasingly precarious nature of the war economy and especially the Navy's fuel supplies. On rejecting this unpalatable alternative they were again thrown back on the other; the necessary raw material could be obtained only by seizing Thailand, where there was rice; Malaya, with its sources of tin, nickel, and rubber; and the Dutch East Indies, with their oil. But, according to the Japanese calculations, the United States was certain to fight if British or Dutch territory in the Far East were attacked. Japanese analysts reached the latter conclusions despite the absence of any American threat or promise. . . .

Having decided against withdrawal from China, failed to negotiate a settlement with America, and decided on the necessity of seizing supplies from Southeast Asia, they were faced with the need to blunt what they regarded as the inevitable American response. Thus they launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor to destroy any American capability for immediate naval offensive. For all the audacity of the strike at Hawaii, its aims were limited: to destroy existing United States offensive capabilities in the Pacific by tactical surprise. The Japanese High Command hoped only to give its forces time to occupy the islands of the Southwest Pacific, to extract those islands' raw materials, and to turn the whole area into a virtually impregnable line of defense which could long delay an American counteroffensive and mete out heavy casualties when the counterattack did come. As a result of their early success the Japanese naval and military chiefs extended this line a little farther than they had first meant to do, but their original intentions were not grandiose.

In deciding to attack Pearl Harbor the Japanese took what they fully recognized to be a great risk. There is no doubt but that the Imperial government realized it could not win a long war with the United States if the Americans chose to fight such a war. Japanese strategists calculated that America's war potential was seven to eight times greater than their own; they knew that Japan could not hope to carry the war to the continental United States. General Suzuki, chairman of the Planning Board, had reported that Japan's stockpile of resources was not adequate to support a long war. Admiral Yamamoto, the brilliant inventor of the Pearl Harbor attack plan, warned: "In the first six months to a year of war against the U.S. and England

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Because the proposed attack seemed an escape from the dilemma it was grasped with more enthusiasm than it deserved. The Japanese never seriously considered exactly what would cause the United States to forego crushing Japan, or how Japan might best create the proper conditions for a negotiated peace. Certain key elements, such as the probable effect of the Pearl Harbor attack on the American will to win, were left completely unanalyzed. Japan's sole strategy involved dealing maximum losses to the United States at the outset, making the prospects of a prolonged war as grim as possible, and counting, in an extremely vague and ill-defined way, on the American people's "softness" to end the war. . . .

. . . [T]he Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, and for that matter on Southeast Asia, [was] not evidence of any unlimited expansionist policy or capability by the Japanese government. It was the consequence only of a much less ambitious goal, centering on an unwillingness to surrender the position that the Japanese had fought for years to establish in China. When that refusal met an equal American determination that Japan should give up many of her gains in China, the result was war. Japanese expansion into Southeast Asia originated less in strength than in weakness; it was predominantly instrumental to the China campaign, not a reach for another slice of global salami. Of course there were Japanese political and military leaders with wider ambitions, but they were not predominant in policy-making.

Throughout the 1930s the United States government had done little to resist the Japanese advance on the Asian continent. There were verbal protests, but little more. Even in early 1941 Washington apparently would have settled for a *halt* in China, and saw little danger of a much wider move into Southeast Asia. But the application of economic sanctions against Tokyo was very successful; it was obviously hurting, and the moderate Premier Prince Konoye proposed a direct meeting with Roosevelt to try to reach an understanding. At about that point the American Government seems to have been so impressed with its success that it rebuffed Konoye's approach, demanding that he agree in advance on terms of a settlement. Konoye's cabinet fell, and American observers concluded—on the basis of untestable evidence that sounded a bit like sour grapes—that he could not have enforced a "reasonable" settlement in Japanese politics anyway. Washington then raised the ante, calling for a Japanese *withdrawal* from all occupied territory in China. Several officials in the State Department proposed settling for a halt, giving China a breathing spell that would have served it better for several more years of war while America made its main effort in the Atlantic. Hull considered and then rejected their plan for such a *modus vivendi*, which rather closely resembled the second of two Japanese proposals ("Plan B") that represented Tokyo's last efforts. Economic sanctions continued to provide a warm moral glow for those who disapproved of trading with an aggressor, but they then served to make inevitable an otherwise avoidable war which was peripheral to American vital interests and for which the country was ill-prepared. . . .

Why then did President Roosevelt and his advisers embark on a series of incremental pressures that had the effect of pushing the Japanese into war? In large part, of course, they decided that Japanese ambitions in China posed a long-term threat to American interests, and so they forced a confrontation. A sentimental American

attitude toward China as a "ward" also must not be forgotten. From missionary days they had been a people "we had always helped," to whom there was a sense of obligation. Roosevelt had a long-time emotional attachment to China, and from his days as Assistant Secretary of the Navy had allegedly "become imbued with the Navy's conviction that Japan was America's Number One enemy."

Nor should economic, as opposed to strategic, motives be ignored as they have been in most conventional histories of the period. . . . But as for the Far East, by embargoing Japan in 1941 the United States was giving up an export trade at least four times that with China. While one must not equate dollar volume perfectly with relative political influence, the impact of China traders can easily be exaggerated. . . .

On purely strategic grounds some observers might argue that the danger was not from Germany, Italy, or Japan alone, but rather from their combination in an aggressive alliance encircling the Western Hemisphere. The rhetoric of the time could suggest such a threat, but in fact the Tripartite Pact of Germany and Italy with Japan had become quite fragile. As explained [previously] . . . it was designed to deter United States entry into either of the then still-separate conflicts. The Japanese foreign minister in early 1941, Yosuke Matsuoka, had negotiated the Pact and was by far its strongest supporter in the cabinet. He tried to persuade his colleagues to follow the German attack on Russia with a similar act by Japan, but failed and was deposed. Thereafter the Pact faded in importance to the Tokyo government. In considering their subsequent negotiations with the United States the Japanese leaders were fully willing to sacrifice the Pact in return for the necessary economic concessions. Had Hitler managed to get himself into war with America in the Atlantic he could not successfully have invoked the Pact unless the Japanese clearly had seen war to be in their own interests.

Moreover, this drift away from Germany was, it has been well argued, adequately known to American and British officials—Ambassadors Grew and Craigie, Cordell Hull, Roosevelt and Churchill—thanks in part to American ability to crack the codes used in all Japanese secret cables. "After Matsuoka's fall . . . no Axis leader was able even to keep up the pretense of expecting Japanese intervention in behalf of Germany and Italy." In the context of late 1941, therefore, the prospects of close cooperation among Germany, Italy and Japan were not very menacing. Given their very diverse long-run interests, and Hitler's racial notions, a "permanent" alliance surely does not seem very plausible. A special irony of the situation is that Roosevelt was particularly anxious to see Hitler beaten first, and that British and Dutch colonial possessions in Southeast Asia, which seemed essential to the European war, be unmolested. His belated insistence on Japanese evacuation from China then pushed the Axis back together and endangered his other goals. . . .

In retrospect, the fear that America would be left alone in the world against two great victorious empires in Europe and Asia seems terribly exaggerated. Clear-cut victory was not in prospect for either, nor does the assumption that they could long have maintained a close alliance seem especially plausible. The critical American mistake may well have been in backing the Japanese into a corner, for without war in the Pacific the American conflict with Germany very possibly could have been held to limited naval engagements, but no clash of ground troops. In short, we might at most have fought a limited war.

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These conclusions are highly speculative; the situation of the time cannot be reproduced for another run, searching for an alternate future. Perhaps I underestimate the risks that an American determination to avoid war would have entailed. On the other hand, the proposition that the war was unnecessary—in a real sense premature, fought before the need was sufficiently clearly established, though the need might well have become apparent later—is worth considering. Just possibly the isolationists were right in their essential perspective.

This last may be unpalatable, especially because the intellectual company of some of the most famous isolationists—William Borah, Hiram Johnson, and Burton Wheeler—is not very distinguished. Others like Father Coughlin were home-grown fascists, or, like Charles Lindbergh, are remembered as naive admirers of Germany. But once more, I do not imagine that the United States should have carried on blithely in 1941 as though nothing were happening elsewhere in the world. Complete isolation would have been much worse than intervention. All Americans would agree that American strategic interests required substantial assistance to the belligerents against Germany. Both Britain and Russia had to be preserved as independent and powerful states. With a little less certainty I would also grant the need to keep a significant portion of China viable.

It seems, however, that those goals could have been achieved by the belligerents themselves, with great American economic and noncombatant military aid. As insurance, American rearmament had to go on. A sustained defense effort not less than what was later accepted during the cold war would have been required. That would imply 10 percent of the American GNP devoted to military purposes, as compared with about that amount actually expended in 1941 and a mere one and one-half percent in 1939. That much, incidentally, would with Lend-Lease have been quite enough to revive the economy from the depression and assuredly does not imply idle resources.

With this prescription I find myself at odds with the extreme critics of Roosevelt's policy, men who spoke at that time and again, briefly, after the war. Most of the President's military and economic acts seem appropriate and, in deed, necessary. I have no quarrel with the decisions for rearmament or to institute Selective Service, with revision of the Neutrality Act to permit "cash-and-carry" by belligerents (effectively by the Allies only), with the destroyers-for-bases exchange, with Lend-Lease, or with the decision to convoy American vessels as far as Iceland. Even the famous "shoot-on-sight" order, even as interpreted to allow American destroyers to seek out the sight of U-boats, seems necessary if the convoys were to be protected on the first stage of the critical lifeline to Britain. I do have some serious reservations about the way in which those decisions were publicly justified, a matter for discussion below. But the content of those decisions seems fully defensible. And irritating as they surely were, Hitler would probably have continued to tolerate them in preference to more active American involvement.

Only two major exceptions to the content of American policy in 1941 appear worth registering. One is the vote by Congress in mid-November 1941, at the President's behest, removing nearly all the remaining restrictions of the Neutrality Act. It permitted American ships to carry supplies all the way across the Atlantic, instead of merely as far as Iceland. This almost certainly would have been too much for Hitler to bear. ...

The other and still more serious exception I take is with President Roosevelt's policy toward Japan as described [previously]. . . . It was neither necessary nor desirable for him to have insisted on a Japanese withdrawal from China. An agreement for a standstill would have been enough, and he did not make an honest diplomatic attempt to achieve it. He refused to meet Prince Konoye in the Pacific to work out a compromise, and after Konye's fall he rejected, on Hull's advice, a draft proposal that could have served as a basis for compromise with the Japanese. We have no guarantee that agreement could have been reached, but here was at least some chance and the effort was not made. . . .

It would of course be unfair and inaccurate to trace all the developments cited in this chapter, and especially the adoption of interventionist policies, only back to 1940, just as it is wrong to think they emerged full-blown at the beginning of the cold war. One can find roots in our earlier Caribbean policy, in Woodrow Wilson's acts, in the war of 1898, and even earlier. But World War II, rather like monosodium glutamate, made pungent a host of unsavory flavors that had until then been relatively subdued. We cannot really extirpate contemporary "global policeman" conceptions from American thinking unless we understand how, in World War II, they developed and became ingrained.

Preface to the Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition

. . . [W]here did the book come from in my personal history? As I stated clearly in the original preface, it stemmed from my experience, as a scholar of American foreign policy, of the Vietnam War. Published at the height of the war, it originated from my disgust and represented my effort to understand why the war had happened and persisted. I believed then, and still do, that such standard interpretations as bureaucratic inertia on Pennsylvania Avenue, economic interest on Wall Street, or anti-communist ideology on Main Street, constitute at best partial explanations that missed a broader kind of ideological underpinning. I would characterize that ideological underpinning as a particular kind of "realist" view of international power politics that exaggerated both the necessity and the possibility of effectively exerting American military power all over the globe. A shorthand label for such a view now comes under the expression "imperial overstretch." And I believe that view was, for many Americans, born out of the experience of World War II. . . .

The fundamental problem with the World War II experience—rightly judged in some degree to be a success—was, in my view, that it led to an exaggerated sense of American power and wisdom; *hubris*, in effect. It seemed such a success that the limits and the particular circumstances of that success were ignored in subsequent policy. And that hubris led to the intervention in Vietnam, a military expedition for which the motivation and the need were far less clear than in World War II. Consequently, the national will for a total commitment in Vietnam was, properly, lacking, and thus the prospects for that intervention were poor. In other words, the construction put upon the World War II experience was an invitation to subsequent failure; to understand that failure, and to avoid repeating it, required some deconstruction of World War II's lessons. It required speculating about whether active American participation in the war could have been avoided, and if so, what the costs and benefits of such an alternative might have been. It was a task for historical evaluation as well as a practically oriented form of theoretical discussion. . . .

A Necessary and Unavoidable War

GERHARD WEINBERG

Hitler's view of the United States was based on an assessment that this was a weak country, incapable because of its racial mixture and feeble democratic government of organizing and maintaining strong military forces. The antagonism of Americans, both in government and among the public, toward Germany was therefore no cause for worry. Certain that Allied victory in World War I was the result of Germany's having been stabbed in the back by the home front, he was never interested in the American military effort in that conflict or any possible renewal of it. He had long assumed that Germany would have to fight the United States after conquering Eurasia, and he had begun preparations toward that end both in airplane and naval construction. The outbreak of war in Europe in 1939, however, forced a temporary postponement in the program to construct a big navy of huge battleships and numerous other surface ships. Although it is not clear when Hitler learned the facts, the project for building planes which could reach the American east coast was also not going well.

Under these circumstances, Hitler preferred to defer war with the United States, not because he was greatly worried about that prospect, but because he saw no reason to rush into premature hostilities when he had not completed his blue-water navy, and the navy actually at his disposal did not yet have the number of submarines which might really seal off the British Isles. Nothing that had happened in 1939 changed his basic views of the United States. . . .

[In mid-1940 t]he great problem for the future was the fact that the Germans had been obliged by the outbreak of war in 1939 to postpone construction of the navy needed for the war which Hitler expected to wage against the United States. The first of the battleships designed with the British navy in mind, the *Bismarck* and the *Tirpitz*, were being completed; but work on the super-battleships which were expected to outclass anything the United States might build had been halted in September 1939. Knowing that the completion of these enormous ships took years, Hitler was eager to have work on them resumed as soon as possible. On July 11, 1940, the orders to do so were agreed upon between him and the Commander-in-Chief of the navy. At a time when Hitler still had some hope that Britain might pull out of the war, he was looking forward to the contest ahead when a great blue-water navy would enable him to defeat the United States with England either conquered or allied with *either* of the two major contestants. Nothing more clearly illuminates the world-wide ambitions of the Third Reich than the decision to press forward with a vast program for constructing battleships, aircraft carriers, and other warships at a time when the war that began in September 1939 was believed to be over. Unlike some post-war German apologists and many non-German historians, Hitler recognized, and acted on the recognition, that a pre-condition for any successful war with the United States was not the selection of American beaches on which to land but the building of a navy that could project German power across the Atlantic. . . .

From Gerhard Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 86–87, 175–178, 182, 238–245, 248, 250–252, 254–259, 261–263. Reprinted by permission of Cambridge University Press.

The navy proposed and Hitler very much made his own a series of projects for bases on and off the coast of Northwest Africa. Included in these plans were bases to be constructed and owned by Germany not only in formerly French colonial possessions, especially the French protectorate of Morocco, but also on Portuguese and Spanish territory, in particular the Spanish Canary Islands. This project, to which the German government clung rigidly in the summer and fall of 1940, is especially illuminating for our understanding of the priorities of Berlin, since the Germans sacrificed the possibility of Spanish participation in the war to it. . . .

. . . The fact that the Germans were willing to forgo Spain's participation in the war rather than abandon their plans for naval bases on and off the coast of Northwest Africa surely demonstrates the centrality of this latter issue to Hitler as he looked forward to naval war with the United States.

For years Hitler had been calling for an airplane capable of bombing the United States, and work on such a plane had been under way since 1937. The realization of this project, however, was still not imminent in 1940, and the Germans could only push forward with it in the hope that by the time the planes were ready, refueling in the Portuguese Azores would be possible and would increase the possible bomb load. The prerequisites for war with the United States were being worked on, but it was obvious that they would take time to complete. While the preparations went forward, a project which was thought to be much simpler and capable of completion long before the huge blue-water navy and swarms of four-engined bombers had been built was to be carried out by Germany's victorious army: the invasion of the Soviet Union and the defeat of that country so that huge portions of it could be annexed and settled by German farmers, and the area's metal and oil resources harnessed to the subsequent campaign against the United States.

The whole project of crushing France and England had, after all, been undertaken only as a necessary preliminary, in Hitler's eye, to the attack in the East which would enable Germany to take the living space, the *Lebensraum*, he believed she needed. . . .

The limited industrial resources of Germany at their relatively low level of mobilization were not, however, capable of coping simultaneously with the preparations for the new land campaign in the East and the construction of the great battleship navy. Once again—as in September 1939—these projects had to be postponed. Victory over the Soviet Union would release the necessary resources for a resumption of construction on the big ships; in the interim, Germany would concentrate at sea on the blockade of Great Britain by submarines and airplanes.

The postponement of fleet building, in turn, had immediate implications for Germany's direct and indirect relations with the United States. In the direct sense, it meant that the German submarines were instructed to be careful of incidents with the United States, and Hitler ordered restraint on a navy ever eager to strike at American shipping. Simultaneously, in the indirect sense the position and role of Japan with its great navy became more important in German eyes. As already mentioned, Hitler anticipated that an attack on the Soviet Union would help propel Japan forward in Asia, thus tying up the United States in the Pacific in the years that Germany was still building her own surface navy. Between the decision to attack Russia and the implementation of that decision, however, there were now the intervening months to consider.

It was in this context that lining up Japan with the Axis came to be seen as increasingly important, a process which met the interests of the new leadership which had come to power in Tokyo in the days of decision in Berlin. The Tripartite Pact of Germany, Italy and Japan was not signed until September 27, but the new impetus from Berlin, in spite of earlier German unhappiness with Japan, needs to be seen in the context of the decisions of late July. Furthermore, the slow dawning on Germany's leaders of the realization that England was not going to give in operated to reinforce the policy choice previously made. A Japanese attack on Britain's possessions in Southeast Asia, particularly on Singapore, could not help but assist Germany's own fight against the United Kingdom. . . .

. . . Since by this time [Hitler] had already decided to attack the Soviet Union, he assumed and repeatedly assured his associates that this step would free Japan to move south, thereby drawing American power into the Pacific. This aspect of German policy will be reviewed in the context of the analysis of Japan's policy leading to the Pacific War, but it must always be kept in mind in assessing Hitler's orders to the German navy in the second half of 1940 and the first half of 1941. Since he planned to attack the Soviet Union and to defeat that country quickly, he would first get America diverted to the Pacific and subsequently be enabled to shift resources to naval construction to deal with the United States directly. In the interim, it made no sense to him to provoke the United States into open hostilities by incidents attendant upon what he believed would be a relatively small increment in U-Boat and surface raider sinkings. He learned from a study he ordered the navy to undertake that a surprise attack by submarines on the American fleet in American harbors was not practically feasible; if that sort of blow was not possible, it made more sense to wait. If an under-water "Pearl Harbor attack" could not be mounted, it would be better to postpone hostilities with the United States until either Germany acquired an ally with a large navy or had time to build one of its own.

The converse of this policy of restraints imposed on the existing German navy was a double one. In the diplomatic field, it meant, as we shall see, urging Japan forward in the Pacific, if necessary with the promise to go to war against the United States alongside Japan if that was what the Japanese believed they needed to do. In the military field, it meant returning from emphasis on the army to emphasis on naval construction and on the air force just as soon as the war in the East seemed to be going as well as Hitler confidently anticipated. It is in this context that one must understand why the moment he (quite incorrectly) believed that the campaign in Russia was going well, Hitler ordered the big program of battleship, aircraft carrier, and cruiser construction resumed. That program had to be set aside in the fall of 1941, as had been necessary in the fall of 1940, when the fighting went very differently from the way Hitler had expected. The failure of the German navy to cancel one of the contracts led to the delivery in *June 1944* of four completed battleship engines. Promptly scrapped, these relics of earlier dreams show how seriously the Germans had held at one time their plans for fighting the American navy.

The American President hoped to avoid open warfare with Germany altogether. He urged his people to aid Great Britain, and he devised and proposed, as we shall see, a whole variety of ways to do just that and to make sure that the aid actually reached its destination; but he hoped until literally the last minute that the United States could stay out of the war. . . .

The general assumption of many that countries are either at war or at peace with each other was not shared by Roosevelt, who knew that the American navy had originated in the quasi-war with France at the turn of the eighteenth to the nineteenth century and that more recently Japan and the Soviet Union had engaged in bloody encounters at specific points in East Asia while continuing to have diplomatic relations and without entering into general hostilities with each other. Some of Roosevelt's advisors did think the United States should or would have to enter the war to assure the defeat of Hitler, but there is no evidence that the President himself abandoned his hope that the United States could stay out. He had been proved right in his belief that Britain could hold on in 1940—against the view of many; he would be proved right in his expectation that the Soviet Union could hold on in 1941—again against the view of many. In a way he would be proved right on the question of formal American entrance into the war. We now have his comments on October 8, 1940; "the time may be coming when the Germans and the Japs [sic] will do some fool thing that would put us in. That's the only real danger of our getting in. . . ."

[In June 1941 t]he President quickly determined to send the Soviet Union whatever help could be provided; the fact that he placed his closest confidante, Harry Hopkins, in charge of this endeavor testifies to the importance he attached to it. Hopkins was sent to Moscow to get the whole project moving and took along Colonel Philip Faymonville, a strong believer in the ability of the Red Army to hold out, to handle aid at the Russian end. Knowing of popular opposition to aid to the Soviet Union, Roosevelt worked hard to try to have people see that this dictatorship was less threatening than the immediate menace of the German dictatorship, and he was especially concerned about calming the widespread concern over the lack of religious freedom in the Soviet Union. There were great worries and enormous difficulties, some growing out of the fact that there had been such vast differences between United States and Soviet policies in the preceding years. The Moscow conferences of early August 1941 produced an agreement on major shipments of military supplies in the face of the preference of United States and British military leaders who preferred to keep what weapons were coming off the assembly lines for their own forces. In the face of the German advances in the East, which if victorious would then free them for a renewed push in the Atlantic, Roosevelt pressed his associates to get the materials moving. In a way, he understood better than many contemporaries and most subsequent observers the anti-American component in Hitler's planning and hoped to preclude its success by making the German search for victory in the East as hard as possible. Difficulties in the production process and the problem of reconciling United States and British needs with those of the Soviet Union kept down actual shipments in 1941, but the fall of that year saw the beginnings of a vast flow. . . .

The American government's greatest concern was that the advance of Japan in Asia would threaten both itself and the British and thereby simultaneously aid Germany and possibly precipitate the United States into war. In the fall of 1940 and the winter of 1940–41 the United States government, under the prodding of Chiang Kai-shek and with Henry Morgenthau as the main advocate of assistance, took new steps to provide credits to China. The hope was that such support would restrain Chiang from making a settlement with the Japanese, because such a settlement would release Japanese forces for adventures elsewhere. It was not a coincidence

that on November 30, 1940, the same day that the Japanese recognized the puppet government of Wang Ching-wei, Roosevelt announced plans for a one hundred million dollar credit for Chiang, and Hull explained that the United States recognized only his government. . . .

All through 1940 and 1941 the Roosevelt administration tried to find ways to hold off Japan while the United States rearmed itself, aided Britain, and, after the German invasion of the Soviet Union, aided the latter. Concentrating primary attention on the Atlantic and the dangers there, the administration hoped to restrain Japan, possibly pry her loose from the Tripartite Pact, and figure out ways to keep her from expanding the war she had already started in China. The assistance provided to the Chinese Nationalists was one element in this policy. The end of the US-Japan trade agreement, which left the Japanese guessing as to the next American step, was another. Roosevelt did not want to take steps which might drive Japan to take radical action, but he was being pushed by a public opinion which objected to the United States selling Japan the materials it needed for the war against China; on this subject the same people who objected to aid for Britain for fear of war were among the most vociferous advocates of a forward policy in East Asia. . . .

The hope of the administration that some accommodation could be reached with Japan which would restrain the latter by a combination of patient negotiations, continued American rearmament, and a passive stance in the Pacific, was dashed by the insistence of the Japanese government on a sweeping offensive in Southeast Asia; but for months there at least appeared to be a prospect of success. That prospect turned out to be a deliberately manufactured illusion created by a few private individuals, who pretended to the Americans that a project they had concocted had the approval of some elements in Japan, at the same time pretending to the Japanese that it had American approval—when in reality neither assertion was true. . . .

In September 1940 the [Japanese] government decided to ally itself with Germany. Now was the time to move in an alignment with Germany to seize all of Southeast Asia, quite possibly adding Burma and India and the islands of the South Pacific. If that meant war with the United States, so be it. Even the navy, at one time reluctant, was now prepared to go along; because of the American naval building program, "now is the most advantageous time for Japan to start a war." . . .

From time to time, the Japanese would point out to the Germans that Japan would be ready to move in 1946, the year when the last United States forces were scheduled to leave the Philippines, to which the Germans responded by pointing out that by that time the war in Europe would be over and the American fleet doubled. Perhaps more important was the German assurance that if Japan could move against Singapore only if she struck the United States at the same time, then she could count on Germany to join her.

This was a point von Ribbentrop had already made in 1939. A detailed examination of the issue by the German naval attaché in Tokyo seemed to show that this would be a good bargain for Germany; Japan as an open ally would more than offset the disadvantages of converting the United States from a tacit to an open enemy of Germany. Here is a key point which most analysts of the situation have overlooked and which has led them to puzzle endlessly and needlessly over Germany's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941. Hitler had long intended to fight the United States. He had tried to begin air and naval preparations for this in the late

1930s. These had been aborted by the outbreak of war in 1939, but on each occasion thereafter, when it looked as if the campaign immediately at hand was over, he had returned to the big blue-water navy program. It was always his belief that Germany needed a big navy to tackle the United States that made him want to postpone war and avoid incidents with the United States; when the right time came he was confident that he would find a good excuse—he always had with other countries.

But if the Japanese, who had hung back so long, took the plunge, then the naval deficit would automatically disappear. He had thought of removing that discrepancy by a German sneak under-water attack on the United States navy in port. Told by his navy that this was impossible, there was the obvious alternative of Japan providing a navy for his side of the war; that the Japanese would do from above the water what he had hoped to do from underneath was not known to him beforehand, but that made no difference. The key point was that Japan's joining openly on the Axis side would provide a big navy right away, not after years of building, and hence remove the main objection to going to war with the United States now rather than later. It was therefore entirely in accord with his perception of the issues that he promised Matsuoka on April 4 that if Japan believed that the only way for her to do what the Germans thought they should do, namely attack the British, was also to go to war at the same time with the United States, they could move in the knowledge that Germany would immediately join them. This policy was fully understood in German headquarters and would be voiced repeatedly thereafter. . . .

The definitive Japanese decision to shift from concentrating on war with China to war against the Western Powers came in early June 1941. The hinge of decision was the shift from occupying *northern* French Indo-China, which was part of the war against China because that country could then be blockaded more effectively, to occupying *southern* Indo-China, which pointed in the opposite direction, that is, to war against the British and Dutch to the south and against the Americans in the Philippines and on the Pacific flank of the southern advance. . . .

Reviewing the situation in a series of meetings between August 16 and September 6, 1941, the Japanese decided to go forward with war. They would seize Southeast Asia, talking with the United States but going to war with her if she did not give in on all points. The sooner war came once the Japanese and navy were ready, the better. Germany and Italy were likely to come in on Japan's side while the Soviet Union could not move against her when engaged in bitter fighting with Germany. The expectation was that in the early stages of war Japan would win great victories and that there would then be a stalemate and a new peace acknowledging her gains. All the key figures, including the Prime Minister, the army and the navy, were in agreement. Only Emperor Hirohito had doubts, but in the face of unanimous advice, he could only assent.

Because of the insistence of the United States government on continuing negotiations and the desire of the Japanese ambassador in the United States (who was not informed about his government's intention) to do so also, the authorities in Tokyo had to reexamine the issues several times in October and November, always coming back to the same conclusion: now was the time to fight. In the process, Konoe became tired of the discussion of a policy he had himself launched and was replaced by War Minister Tojo Hideki, but there was no inclination within the government to reverse the course for war. The new Foreign Minister, Togo Shigenori, and Finance

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Minister Kaya Okinori had doubts but were overridden by the others. The Japanese would demand control of Southeast Asia, the end of American aid to Chiang Kai-shek and guarantee of American oil deliveries with more demands to come if these were accepted. War would come in early December, and once the Western Powers had been defeated, Japan would attack the Soviet Union. Germany and Italy would be asked to join in. With all at the end of the discussions again in agreement, the Emperor's plaintive asking of questions (probably inspired by Kido), such as how could Japan justify invading Thailand and how would Japan cope with airplane and submarine attacks on oil transports, were brushed aside. The course was set for war. . . .

The Japanese had decided to provide a public explanation by making extensive demands on the United States which they expected to be refused and which could be increased if accepted. A lengthy memorandum was therefore sent to Washington following on earlier such demands. In between, they received and disregarded a restatement of the American position (which they afterwards for propaganda purposes called an ultimatum). All this was shadow-boxing. The Japanese government had decided on war; had kept this fact from their own diplomats in Washington so that these could appear to be negotiating in good faith; and instructed them to present a lengthy note in time for Japan to initiate hostilities. . . .

In reality, the Pearl Harbor attack proved a strategic and tactical disaster for Japan, though the Japanese did not recognize this. The ships were for the most part raised; by the end of December, two of the battleships [Admiral] Yamamoto [Isoroku] had imagined sunk were on their way to the West Coast for repairs. All but the *Arizona* returned to service, and several played a key role . . . in a great American naval victory in October 1944. Most of the crew members survived to man the rebuilding American navy. These tactical factors were outgrowths of the basic strategic miscalculation. As anyone familiar with American reactions to the explosion on the *Maine* or the sinking of the *Lusitania* could have predicted, an unprovoked attack in peacetime was guaranteed to unite the American people for war until Japan surrendered, thus destroying in the first minutes of war Japan's basic strategy. The hope that the American people would never expend the blood and treasure needed to reconquer from Japan all sorts of islands—most of which they had never heard of—so that these could be returned to others or made independent, became completely unrealistic with the attack on Pearl Harbor. The attainment of surprise guaranteed defeat, not victory, for Japan.

Others were eager to join Japan in war with the United States. The Germans and Italians had been asked by Japan to join in and enthusiastically agreed. Mussolini had already promised to join in on December 3 and now did so, an extraordinary situation given Italy's string of defeats. Hitler had repeatedly urged the Japanese to move against Britain and was positively ecstatic that they had acted at last. The idea of a Sunday morning air attack in peacetime was especially attractive to him. He had started his campaign against Yugoslavia that way a few months earlier; here was an ally after his own heart. Now there would be a navy of battleships and aircraft carriers to deal with the Americans. His own navy had been straining at the leash for years and could now sink ships in the North Atlantic to its heart's content. Since the Japanese had not told Hitler precisely when they planned to move, he had just returned to East Prussia from the southern end of the Eastern Front, where he had dealt with a crisis caused by a Soviet counter-offensive, when the news of Pearl

Harbor reached him. It would take a few days to organize the proper ceremonies in Berlin on December 11, but that did not have to hold up the open hostilities he was eager to begin. In the night of December 8–9, at the earliest possible moment, orders were given to sink the ships of the United States and a string of countries in the Western Hemisphere. Two days later Hitler told an enthusiastic Reichstag the good news of war with America. Those who really believed that Germany had lost World War I because of a stab-in-the-back, not defeat at the front, were certain that it was American military power which was the legend. For once the unanimity in the Reichstag mirrored near unanimity in the government of the Third Reich. The German government's only worry was that the Americans might get their formal declaration of war in before they could deliver one themselves; they would get their way.

President Roosevelt asked and obtained declarations of war against Germany and Italy from Congress in response to the German and Italian declarations, steps which those countries had followed up by a treaty with Japan promising never to sign a separate peace. When Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria also declared war on the United States, the President tried to get these declarations withdrawn. Perhaps the peoples of those countries could live quite happily without having a war with the United States. But the effort to persuade them of this truth failed, and in June the Congress reciprocated. The whole world was indeed aflame.



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Harbor reached him. It would take a few days to organize the proper ceremonies in Berlin on December 11, but that did not have to hold up the open hostilities he was eager to begin. In the night of December 8–9, at the earliest possible moment, orders were given to sink the ships of the United States and a string of countries in the Western Hemisphere. Two days later Hitler told an enthusiastic Reichstag the good news of war with America. Those who really believed that Germany had lost World War I because of a stab-in-the-back, not defeat at the front, were certain that it was American military power which was the legend. For once the unanimity in the Reichstag mirrored near unanimity in the government of the Third Reich. The German government's only worry was that the Americans might get their formal declaration of war in before they could deliver one themselves; they would get their way.

President Roosevelt asked and obtained declarations of war against Germany and Italy from Congress in response to the German and Italian declarations, steps which those countries had followed up by a treaty with Japan promising never to sign a separate peace. When Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria also declared war on the United States, the President tried to get these declarations withdrawn. Perhaps the peoples of those countries could live quite happily without having a war with the United States. But the effort to persuade them of this truth failed, and in June the Congress reciprocated. The whole world was indeed aflame.



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